DRAMA

CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR READING PLAYS

Before you begin to analyze a play, consider the following questions:

1. What is the central conflict in the play? How is it resolved?
2. Does the play contain any secondary conflicts (subplots)? How do they relate to the main conflict?
3. Does the play follow a traditional dramatic structure (three-act play, Shakespearean drama)? What is the climax? Is there a denouement?
4. Who is the main character or protagonist? What sort of person is he or she? Does this protagonist have a fatal flaw? Is the protagonist a hero?
5. Is the antagonist (the one who opposes the protagonist) a person, an environment, or a social force? If a person, does the antagonist cause conflict intentionally?
6. Do the other characters provide exposition (background information)? Are they used as foils to oppose, contrast, criticize, and thus help the main characters?
7. What are the time and setting of the play? How important are these elements? Could the play be set just as effectively in another time or place?
8. Does the title provide any clues to an understanding of the play? If you had to give the play another title, what would it be?
9. What is the theme of the play? Can you state it in a simple sentence?
10. Is the play a tragedy, a comedy, or a mixture? Is this classification important?
11. Would you consider the play a modern drama? Why or why not?
12. Is the presentation realistic? Does the playwright use any special theatrical devices (such as lighting, music, costumes, distinctive or surreal settings)? If so, what effect do they have on your impression of the play?